

WOMEN AT WORK

name which was kept secret and never spoken except in states of possession or when the obia man called on a person's spirit. For girls, Amba for a Saturday child, Affi for one born on Friday, Adjuba for Wednesday; and for the boys some of the names were Kwaku, for Monday, Yao for Thursday, Kofi for Friday, and Kwasi for Sunday. Then there was the name which the father gave, and after that any of the family who cared added a name and made the child a present. 551

From the day it was born until it was at least two years old a child fed at its mother's breast. For twelve moons and five more of this time the woman could not go to the hammock with a man. It was then that her husband went to the distant French shore to work or to the railhead. But after seventeen months of nursing were past, he came back. 853 846

"If a child is made before a woman gets back her menstrual flow, then it is a god. It is Kesefu. A child born first some call Agosu, and some Asaeng. The child born after twins we call Dosu, and twins are Hohobi. Now it is in your book. You will give those names to your children, and your sister's children. No one will know at all what names these are. No one will be able to harm them." 844 [842] [845]

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In the quarter immediately adjoining that of the Granman there was great activity. Six or seven men and boys were at work on a new house, for the youngest daughter of the family was ready for marrying, and now the men were helping her suitor to build a house for her in her village. 585 476

From the same quarter, behind a house which stood in the shade, came the laughter of young girls. We made our way past the house and saw four girls ranging in age from thirteen to sixteen seated on a log. One of these held her head back, and an older girl was bending over her. They called to us as we passed. 204

"We are cutting kamemba. Do you want some cuts, too?"

These were not new cuts which were being made, for with perhaps one exception, the girls were all nubile, and

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609 mother. The woman who had made Bayo was her sister, she told us.

142 The resemblance between this woman and Bayo was marked. She had the same dark skin, the same stocky, muscular build, the broad nose, the same general cast of features we had known so well in Bayo. Similar, too, were the sharply etched scars on her face, which were so black and so prominent as to bespeak her great vitality and rugged health. There were other likenesses, we learned, and of these the most valued was the strength of their gods.

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562 We had not been long in her hut before we noticed the iron arm-band she wore. It was, we knew, a "tapu"—a magical preventive which, in this instance, warned its wearer of danger, and kept her from harm in a combat. Seeing it on the arm of a woman was astonishing for many reasons. Not in all our encounters on the river had we seen a woman wearing an arm obia of iron. Iron was the sign of the Kromanti, a men's group, composed of those men who had the Kromanti spirit. It was in part warriors' secret society, and in part, when it was Obia Kromanti, the men's religious society which controlled the powerful supernatural forces of preventive and healing magic which played so prominent a part in the spiritual life of the Bush Negro. Now there were, we had been told, some women who inherited the Kromanti spirit, but these were few, and not until after their menopause could they enter a Kromanti house, and when this came they were too old to participate in the dance, but they sang the songs when the spirit came to them and did whatever else was known to the initiated of their years.

1593 But this woman who was Bayo's mother's sister was not an old woman. As she talked to us, in fact, her breast was swung over to the side, and against her ribs was the head of the child on her back who was nursing. Yet on her arm was the fighter's "tapu," as the emblem of membership in the Kromanti group.

This was so important an anomaly that, following the etiquette of the bush, we hastened at once to talk about something else.

§32 Company, some ninety miles in the interior, we were informed by the physician in charge that it is not infrequent to have Bush Negro women report for internal disturbances, which upon examination prove to be irritation and small hemorrhagic areas. The physician believed that this condition was due to the men's practice of using the mucra-mucca seed.

¶ During childbirth the mother stays in her own hut. She is often attended by her mother, her female relatives, and friends. In every village there are one or more women who are skilled in the art of midwifery; these women are called *pekein mama*—either "little mother" or "mother of little children." At the time of childbirth, the *pekein mama* is assisted by four little girls from about ten to twelve years of age. The *pekein mama* uses a liberal quantity of hot water in the process of delivery. In the event of an abnormal condition, it is the duty of the *pekein mama* to deliver the child as skilfully as possible. The woman bears the ordeal of childbirth with the usual primitive fortitude, although the pains of labour seem to be as great among these people as among

¶ women of more civilized countries. The mother must drink only hot water for three months after the birth of the child.

●§33 Children are nursed at the breast for a period of three months. They are then fed a little mush made of *canava* to which is gradually added rice, a small amount of meat, eggs, and plenty of fruit, but periodical nursing may sometimes continue for as long as two years. The mothers often chew the food before giving it to their babies.

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not severed gently enough. During the nursing period it is often customary for the mother to obtain from intercourse, and judging by the size of the nursing children this period may last for two years.

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The children are carried in the West African manner, astride on their mothers' backs and held by a band of wide cloth that goes around both mother and child. This is unlike the local Indian custom, in which the squaws carry their offspring on their hips. The children are washed often, being bathed several times a day beside the river; they stand and gurgle as the water is being poured over them.

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The number of births among the Djukas is not as great as might be inferred from their promiscuity. This suggests, of course, that some means of contraception is practised. In one village on the Saramacca River a medicine man showed the bushkra a yellow berry, an infusion of which is supposed to have abortive properties; it is known among the natives of British Guiana as "Doctor Doolittle." We doubt that the infusion has any such properties as are assigned to it. We also heard that the Djukas practice mechanical abortion, but their crude instruments must make this very dangerous.

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Excepting during the first two or three years of the children's lives, mothers actually have little to do with their care. There are usually several older children in the family, sisters, brothers, or cousins, to whom is relegated the care of the younger ones. Besides their ordinary names, children are also called according to the day of the week on which they were born, such as Monday-child, Tuesday-child, and so on.